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THE PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE OF GUIDO CAVALCANTI

In 1283 the young Dante sent out among the best known Italian poets a sonnet asking interpretation of a dream. The god of love, so it seemed, had come carrying Beatrice asleep, and had fed her with Dante's own heart, and had then departed weeping.

Several poets answered. One, Dante of Maiano, suggested as a probable solution of this, and other such distressing visions, a dose of salts; the others fell in with Dante's mood and answered seriously. Of their various interpretations that which best pleased Dante, though not quite satisfied him, was Guido Cavalcanti's. "And this," wrote Dante later in the *New Life*, "was, as it were, the beginning of the friendship between him and me, when he knew that I was he who had sent it (the sonnet) to him."

Guido's interpretation was in an important particular ambiguous. Love, he wrote, fed your heart to your lady, seeing that "*vostra donna la morte chedea*." To understand this clause as meaning "Death claimed your lady" is natural, and would make the interpretation interestingly prophetic; but, whether or not this reading might be justified symbolically, Dante himself forbids it. For, in spite of his pleasure in his "first friend's" explanation of the dream, he added: "The true meaning of this dream was not then seen by any one, but now it is plain to the simplest." It was easy for him after the event to read prophecy of Beatrice's death into the dream; but he expressly denies to Guido among the rest the prescience. We are bound, therefore, to take as the interpreter's meaning that there was malice prepense in the cannibal appetite of the sleeping lady, that she claimed the death of her servant's heart. No wonder the love god wept as he carried her off sated!

Irreverent though it be, one thinks of *The Vampire* of Kipling. For Guido the gentle Beatrice was as "the woman who could n't

understand," sucking, asleep, in a sort of diabolical innocence, the life blood, literally eating the heart, out of her helpless victim. And Dante, the lover, the victim, approves the picture!

Of course the gruesomeness of this symbolism may be explained away as merely a conceitfully emphatic reassertion of the ancient fancy that a lover's heart is no longer his own, but has passed into the custody of his mistress. Only, the dream then and its interpretation would indeed be a much ado about nothing. And why, at so customary a happening, should love weep? In fact, Guido's thought cuts deeper, and is, I venture to urge, not so remote, in a sense, from the thought underlying *The Vampire*. It is *The Vampire* uplifted into the more tenuous, yet no less intense, atmosphere of mysticism.

Before attempting to let in light directly upon this dim utterance it is expedient to recall certain facts in Guido's life and personality.

"Cortese e ardito, ma sdegnoso e solitario e intento allo studio" — so Guido is introduced into the *Florentine Chronicle* of Dino Compagni, who knew him personally. Guido could not have been much over twenty-five when, at the death of his father, his elder brother being in orders, he became head and champion of one of the two or three most powerful and aristocratic families in the republic. For generations the Cavalcanti had been leaders in the state, haughtily contemptuous of the mere people, yet fierce partisans of civic independence against those who were willing to sacrifice this for the dream of a "Greater Italy" united under a revived Emperor of the West. To this great feud and to the lesser local feuds which grew out of it Guido may be said to have been a predestined, yet mostly a willing, sacrifice. He was born into the feud; he lived his life long in the heat of it; it married him; it perhaps lost him his best friend; it certainly killed him before his time.

It married him. In 1267, a year after the decisive battle of Benevento, when the last hope of the Imperialists, the Ghibellines, fell with Manfred, in Florence an attempt was made towards permanent peace by marrying together certain sons and daughters of victors and vanquished. Among the rest Guido Cavalcanti was wedded, or then more likely betrothed, — for he could not have been more than fifteen, — to Bice, daughter of the Ghibelline leader, the Florentine "Coriolanus," Farinata degli Uberti. Seven years before Farinata

had "painted the Arbia red" with the blood of Florentine Guelphs at Monteperti; and it had been a kinsman of Guido who commanded the Guelphs on that disastrous day. We do not know how this real "Capulet-Montague" match turned out, — only that Monna Bice bore children to her husband and outlived him many years, and that the peace which their union, among others, was intended to effect did not come to pass.

On the contrary the great Guelph families, after 1267 in secure possession of the city, soon quarreled, even connived against each other with the ever-ready Ghibelline exiles, or with popular demagogues, so great was their common jealousy. Meanwhile, during the distraction of the nobles, the middle classes had been prospering; and coming at last to feel their strength and the weakness of those above them, in 1293 they rebelled and crushed the aristocrats. In the first insolence of triumph they excluded the nobles absolutely from public office, but two years later conceded eligibility to such nobles as would join one of the *Arti*, or trades unions. This virtual abdication of caste Guido Cavalcanti refused to make. In vain good easy Dino pleaded with him. "I am ever singing your praises," he wrote in a kindly sonnet, "telling folks how wise you are, and brave and strong, skilled to wield and ward the sword, and how compact with sifted learning your mind is, and how you can run and leap and outlast the best. Nor is there lacking you high birth nor wealth . . . in fine, the one thing wanting to give scope to all these gifts and powers is a mere name.

"Ahi! com saresti stato om mercadiere!"

Now almost certainly some generations back the Cavalcanti had been in trade, and had made their fortune in trade, but latterly it had pleased them to entertain a genealogy reaching royally back into Germany and descending into Italy with Charlemagne's baronage. To traverse this pleasing legend with the gross title "om mercadiere," tradesman, was out of the question: Guido declared himself irreconcilable.

Meanwhile Dante, unfettered by a legend or a temperament, had accepted the situation even cordially, and was taking active part in the councils of the new bourgeois régime. That Guido must

have regarded his friend's secession with disgust seems natural. It was worse than an offense against party; it was an offense against caste. "Uomo vertudioso in molte cose, se non ch'egli era troppo tenero e stizzozo," writes Giovanni Villani of Guido. Fastidious, exclusive, thin-skinned, choleric, Guido was just the man to feel this consorting of his friend with vulgar political upstarts incompatible with their own intimacy. And the matter was made worse by its open denial of their poetic profession of faith in the "cor gentile." This vulgar folk was that "fango," that human "mud" of which Guinizelli had written :

Fere lo sole il fango tutto'l giorno,
Vile riman . . .

how might the "gentle heart" mix itself with this irredeemable "mud" and be not defiled? So Guido addressed to his friend a sonnet at once haughty and tender — like Guido himself:¹

Io vengo il giorno a te infinite volte
e trovoti pensar troppo vilmente:
allor mi dol de la gentil tua mente
e d'assai tue virtù che ti son tolte.

Solevanti spiacer persone molte,
tuttor fuggivi la noiosa gente,
di me parlavi sì coralemente
che tutte le tue rime avei ricolte.

Or non ardisco per la vil tua vita,
far mostramento che tu' dir mi piaccia,
nè vengo'n guisa a te che tu mi veggi.

Se 'l presente sonetto spesso leggi
lo spirito noioso che ti caccia
si partirà da l'anima invilita.²

¹ I believe that E. Lamma, in his *Questioni Dantesche*, Bologna, 1902, was the first to propose this construction of the famous "reproach." It seems to me the best of all.

² I come to thee infinite times a day
And find thee thinking too unworthily:
Then for thy gentle mind it grieveth me,
And for thy talents all thus thrown away.

Whether the two friends again came together in life is not known. The next situation in which we hear of them is tragic. Dante is sitting among his "first friend's" judges; Guido is condemned to exile, and goes — in effect — to his death.

Under the new bourgeois rule civic disorders rather increased than otherwise. Prime mover of discord was the Florentine "Catiline," as Dino calls him, Corso Donati. Somewhat ineffectually opposing his self-seeking machinations were the *parvenu* Cerchi, powerful only through wealth and the popularity of their cause. With these also stood Guido. Hatred, no less than misfortune, makes strange bed-fellows; and the hatred between Guido and Corso was intense. Each had sought the other's life: Corso meanly, by hired assassins; Guido openly, in the public street, by his own hand. Violence followed violence; the number of factionaries increased, until at last in 1300 the city Priors determined to expel the leaders of both parties. Guido was conspicuous among these leaders; Dante, as has been said, among these Priors. The place of exile, Sarzana, proved to be pestilent with fever; and although Guido and the Cerchi, less culpable than Corso, were recalled within the year, it was too late. A few months afterward, the 28th or 29th of August, 1300, Guido died. "*E fu gran dommagio*," wrote Dino.

It was a strange preparation for "gentle and gracious rhymes of love," — this short, tumultuous, hate-driven career. Yet there is but one direct echo of the feudist in all Guido's verse, — a sonnet to a kinsman, Nerone Cavalcanti. Nerone had made Florence too

To flee the vulgar herd was once thy way,
To bar the many from thine amity;
Of me thou spakest then so cordially
When thou hadst set thy verse in full array.

But now I dare not, so thy life is base,
Make manifest that I approve thine art,
Nor come to thee so thou mayst see my face.

Yet if this sonnet thou wilt take to heart,
The perverse spirit leading thee this chase
Out of thy soul polluted shall depart.

hot for the rival Buondelmonti, and Guido hails him with ironical deprecation.

Novelle ti so dire, odi, Nerone,
che' Bondelmonti treman di paura,
e tutt' i fiorentin' no li assicura,
udendo dir che tu a' cor di leone.

E più treman di te che d' un dragone
veggendo la tua faccia, ch' è sì dura
che no la riterria ponte nè mura
se non la tomba del re faraone.

De! com' tu fai grandissimo peccato
sì alto sangue voler discacciare,
chè tutti vanno via senza ritegno.

Ma ben è ver che ti largar lo pegno,
di che potrai l' anima salvare
se fossi paziente del mercato.¹

Guido's disdainful temper both piqued and puzzled his townsfolk. Sacchetti's anecdote² of the Florentine small boy who, having slyly nailed Guido's gown to his bench, then teased him until the irate gentleman tried — naturally to his discomfiture — to chase him, has

¹ News have I for thee, Nero, in thine ear.
They of the Buondelmonte quake with dread,
Nor by all Florence may be comforted,
For that thou hast a lion's heart they hear.

And more than any dragon thee they fear,
For looking on thy face they are as dead:
Bastion nor bridge against it stands in stead,
Nor less than Pharaoh's grave were barrier.

Marry! but thou hast done a wicked thing,
Having the heart to scatter such high blood,
For without let now one and all they flee.

And 'sooth, a truce-bait too they proffered thee,
So that thy soul might still be with the Good,
Hadst but had stomach for the bargaining.

For the first quatrain of this sonnet I have slightly altered Rossetti's translation. In the rest a mistaken understanding of the sonnet as if addressed to the pope has misled him.

² *Nov.* 68.

its point in a very human satisfaction at the scorner scorned. Boccaccio's novella¹ is more significant, illustrating vividly, if perhaps by a fictitious occurrence only, the subtle mingling of awe and defiance which Guido inspired. Boccaccio's "character" of Guido is a eulogy. "He was one of the best thinkers (*loici*) in the world and an accomplished lay philosopher (*filosofo naturale*), . . . and withal a most engaging, elegant, and affable gentleman, easily first in whatever he undertook, and in all that befitted his rank." This character, together with the mood of tragic doubt upon which the point of Boccaccio's narrative turns, inevitably, if tritely, brings to mind Ophelia's character of Hamlet:

The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword;
The expectancy and rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
The observed of all observers. . . .

But, if we may still trust Boccaccio, "that noble and most sovereign reason" of Guido was also "out of tune and harsh" with scrupulous doubt; "so that lost in speculation, he became abstracted from men. And since he held somewhat to the opinion of the Epicureans, gossip among the vulgar had it that these speculations of his only went to establish, if established it might be, that there was no God."

Boccaccio does not call Guido an atheist; that was mere vulgar gossip. He does not even declare him a convinced Epicurean, one of those who with his own father

. . . l'anima col corpo morta fanno.

Boccaccio's charge is qualified: "he held somewhat to the opinion of the Epicureans" (*egli alquanto tenea della opinione degli Epicuri*). Dante's commentator, indeed, Benvenuto da Imola, is more categorical and extreme: "Errorem, quem pater habebat ex ignorantia, ipse (Guido) conabatur defendere per scientiam." Benvenuto is even remoter in time, however, than Boccaccio; and his phrasing suggests at least a mere perpetuation of that vulgar gossip which Boccaccio contemptuously records. But can we trust Boccaccio's own testimony?

At least there is no antecedent improbability. Skepticism was common, especially in the highly educated class to which Guido

¹ *Decam.*, VI, 9.

belonged; and it was not unnatural at any rate for him to weigh carefully an opinion held by his own father. Again, there is nothing in either his life or writings to indicate an active faith. Much indeed has been made of his "pilgrimage" to the shrine of St. James at Compostella; but the mood of this was so little serious that a pretty face at Toulouse was enough to change his intention. The ironical sonnet of Muscia of Siena is a hint that his contemporaries could not take him very seriously as a pious pilgrim; and Muscia stresses Guido's excuse for breaking his supposed vow that there was no vow in the case — "*non v'era botto*." Guido *may* have started in a moment of reaction from his doubt — does not doubt itself imply a wavering will? He *may* have left Florence as a matter of prudence — Corso tried to have him assassinated on the way as it was. As for his writings, these, considering the intimate theological associations of the school of Guinizelli, are noticeably barren of religious feeling or phrase; and he certainly scandalized the worthy, if narrow, Orlandi by his jesting sonnet about the thaumaturgic shrine of "*my Lady*." The hypothetical confirmation of Guido's skepticism, on the other hand, in his "disdain for Virgil," mentioned by Dante in his answer to the elder Cavalcanti's question¹ why Dante's "first friend" had not accompanied him, has been discredited after twenty years of support by its own proposer, D'Ovidio. The passage is, to be sure, still a moot question; and D'Ovidio, even in the zeal of his recantation, still admits the allegorical taking of it to be plausible as a secondary intention on Dante's part. In any case, even waiving the confirmation, the tradition of Guido's skepticism is not impugned; and in view of the persistent tradition, and of the antecedent probability in its favor, the burden of disproof would seem to rest on those who reject the tradition. Meanwhile, I propose to test the credibility of the tradition by assuming it. If the assumption proves to be a factor in a coherent and credible interpretation of Guido's poetry, the credibility of the assumption proportionately increases. The argument is of course a circle, but I think not a vicious circle.

There is also another tradition, which happens likewise to be subsidiary to the same end. As the one tradition charges Guido with unfaith in religion, so the other charges him with faithlessness in love.

¹ *Inf.*, X, 60.

Recently Mr. Maurice Hewlett, in his *Masque of Dead Florentines*, has seized upon this supposed fickleness of Guido as Guido's characteristic trait. Guido is made to say :

My way was best.
From lip to lip I past, from grove to grove :
I am like Florence ; they call me Light o' Love.

I am dubious indeed about that literal criticism which surmises a "family skeleton" in every locked sonnet. Heine assuredly reckoned without his *Scholar* when he complained :

Diese Welt glaubt nicht an Flammen,
Und sie nimmt's für Poesie.

When Guido writes a sonnet describing how Love had wounded him with three arrows,—*Beauty, Desire, Hope of Grace*,—it is hardly fair for Rossetti to entitle his own translation *He speaks of a third love of his*. Rossetti the scholar should have known better. Of course Guido is simply copying a conceit from the *Romance of the Rose* : the three arrows are three arrows from the eyes of one lady, not of three ladies. Again, it is almost worse when poor Guido essays a pretty *pastourelle*, which is by definition a gallant adventure between a passing knight and a shepherdess, to discuss the "peccadillo" in a solemn footnote ! Yet Rossetti, himself a poet, does so. Nay, Guido's latest learned editor, Signor Rivalta, speaks¹ of his singing "anche i suoi desideri meno puri e più umani come nella ballata :

In un boschetto trovai pastorella . . ."

This ballata is the *pastourelle* in question. Still, waiving such pseudo-revelations of a stethoscopic criticism, there are, considering the meagerness of Guido's poetical remains, hints enough besides the mention of several ladies—Mandetta, Pinella, and by inference her whom Dante calls Giovanna—to accept with discretion sober Guido Orlandi's perhaps malicious insinuation, when he inquires of Guido Cavalcanti concerning the nature, the effects, the virtues of Love :

Io ne domando voi, Guido, di lui :
odo che molto usate in la sua corte ;

¹ *Le Rime di Guido Cavalcanti*, Bologna, 1902, p. 23.

and even the cruder implication in Orlandi's boast of his chaster mind :

Io per lung' uso disusai lo primo
amor carnale : non tangio nel limo.

Reckless feudist, unbeliever, "light o' love," squire of dames, profound thinker, gracious gentleman — a perplexing motley of a man ; it is no wonder that his poetry, reflecting himself, more easily with its many-faceted light dazzles rather than illumines the understanding. In addition, one has to contend in his more doctrinal pieces, especially in the famous canzone of love, with a rigorous scholastic terminology dovetailed into a most intricate metrical schema, and with a text at the best corrupt. In spots Guido — as we have him — is as hopeless as Persius ; yet we may waive these and still venture upon a general interpretation.

In general, Guido's love poems hinge upon two parallel but opposite moods, — a radiant mood of worshipful admiration of his lady, a tragic mood of despair wrought in him by his love of her. His sight of her is a rapture, as in the most magnificent of his sonnets, beginning "Chi è questa che ven" :

Chi è questa che ven ch' ogn' om la mira
e fa tremar di chiariatate l' a're,
e mena seco amor sì che parlare
null' omo pote, ma ciascun sospira?

O Deo, che sembra quando li occhi gira
dica 'l Amor, ch' i' no 'l savria contare:
cotanto d'umiltà donna mi pare,
ch' ogn' altra ver di lei i' la chiam' ira.

Non si poria contar la sua piagenza,
ch' a lei s' inchina ogni gentil virtute,
e la beltate per sua dea la mostra.

Non fu sì alta già la mente nostra
e non si pose in noi tanta salute,
che propriamente n' aviam canoscenza.¹

¹ Lo! who is this which cometh in men's eyes
And maketh tremulously bright the air,
And with her bringeth love so that none there
Might speak aloud, albeit each one sighs?

The sonnet is a superb tribute ; but it is also more. It contains, as I conceive, the pivotal idea in Guido's philosophy of love,—namely, in the lines describing his mistress as

Lady of Meekness such, that by compare
All others as of Wrath I recognize.
(cotanto d'umiltà donna mi pare,
ch' ogn' altra ver di lei i' la chiam' ira.)

Ira . . . umiltà: wrath . . . meekness — the antithesis dominates Guido's thought. Wrath is in his vocabulary the concomitant of imperfection, of desire ; meekness the concomitant of perfection, of peace. He, the lover, is therefore in a state of wrath ; she, the lovable, in a state of meekness, —

Quiet she, he passion-rent.

The identification of passionate love with a state of wrath is fundamental in Guido's philosophy. It is the germinal idea of the doctrinal canzone beginning "Donna mi prega." In answer to the query as to the where and whence of the passion —

Là ove si posa e chi lo fa creare —
he declares that

In quella parte dove sta memora
prende suo stato, sì formato come
diaffan da lume, — d'una scuritate
la qual da Marte vene e fa dimora.¹

"In that part where memory is love has its being ; and, even as light enters into an object to make it diaphanous, so there enters into the

Dear God, what seemeth if she turn her eyes
Let Love's self say, for I in no wise dare:
Lady of Meekness such, that by compare
All others as of Wrath I recognize.

Words might not body forth her excellence,
For unto her inclineth all sweet merit,
Beauty in her hath its divinity.

Nor was our understanding of degree,
Nor had abode in us so blest a spirit,
As might thereof have meet intelligence.

¹ vv. 15-18. I use here as elsewhere the edition of Ercole Rivalta, Bologna, 1902.

constitution of love a dark ray from Mars, which abides." Now Dante conceives love as an emanation from the star of the third heaven, Venus, along a bright ray: "I say then that this spirit (i.e. of love) comes upon the 'rays of the star' (i.e. of the third heaven, Venus), because you are to know that the rays of each heaven are the path whereby their virtue descends upon things that are here below. And inasmuch as rays are no other than the shining which cometh from the source of the light through the air even to the thing enlightened, and the light is only in that part where the star is, because the rest of the heaven is diaphanous (that is transparent), I say not that this 'spirit,' to wit this thought, cometh from their heaven in its totality but from their star. Which star, by reason of nobility in them who move it, is of so great virtue that it has extreme power upon our souls and upon other affairs of ours," etc.¹ So Dante. Guido, on the other hand, while accepting the notion of love as an emanation, holds the emanation to be rather from the star of the fifth heaven, Mars, along a dark ray. The power over the soul of this star is no less extreme than that of Venus; only it is, in a sense, a power of darkness rather than of light. It may strike at life itself —

Di sua potenza segue spesso morte. (v. 35)

The passion which its influence excites passes all normal bounds in any case, destroying all healthful equilibrium:

L'esser è quando lo voler è tanto
 ch' oltra misura di natura torna:
 poi non s' adorna di riposo mai.
 Move cangiando color riso e pianto
 e la figura con paura storna. . . .² (vv. 43-47)

Finally, — and here we reach the gist of the matter, — the influence of the choleric planet engenders sighs and fiery wrath in the

¹ *Conv.*, II, vii. (Wicksteed's translation.)

² It has its being when the passionate will
 Beyond all measure of natural pleasure goes:
 Then with repose unblest forever, starts
 Laughter and tears, aye changing color still,
 And on the face leaves pallid trace of woes.

lover, impotent to reach the ever-receding goal of his desire (*non fermato loco*):

La nova qualità move sospiri
e vol ch' om miri in non fermato loco
destandos' ira, la qual manda foco.¹

This strangely pessimistic reading of love seems to have struck at least one of Guido's contemporaries with indignant surprise, not only at the apparent slight upon love, but also at the silence seeming to give assent of other poets, especially of Dante. Cecco d'Ascoli, in his *Acerba*, iii, 1, denies that so sweet a thing as love could emanate from the planet Mars, seeing that from that planet rather "proceeds violence with wrath" (*procede l'impeto con l'ire*); wherefore:

Errando scrisse Guido Cavalcanti. . .
qui ben mi sdegna lo tacer di Danti.

In fact, Dante, in the sonnet in the sixteenth chapter of the *New Life*, apparently alludes sympathetically to Guido's dark rays of love—

Spesse fiate vegnommi a la mente
l'oscure qualità ch' Amor mi dona—

and proceeds to describe, though not by this name, just such a "state of wrath" in himself as Guido believes inseparable from love. With Dante, of course, the mood is but passing. For him love is in its essence a beneficent power.

For Guido also it might seem that this tragic wrath of desire is not incurable. There is a power in meekness to overcome wrath and to subdue wrath also to meekness. And the meek one is impelled to exercise this power, to confer this boon, by pity for the one suffering in wrath. It is the failure to follow this blessed impulse for which Guido reproaches his lady in the octave of the sonnet beginning "Un amoroso sguardo," when he says that she is one

. . . for whom availeth not
Nor grace nor pity nor the suffering state. . .
(. . . verso cui non vale
Merzede nè pietà nè star soffrente. . .)

¹ The novel state incites to sighs, and makes
Man to pursue an ever-shifting aim,
Till in him wrath is kindled, spitting flame.

Meekness, grace, pity, the suffering state of wrath — the terms have a scriptural sound, and of right; for they are actually scriptural analogies applied to love. Precisely this poetical analogy was the innovation of Guido Guinizelli, whom Dante called “father of me and of my betters,” — of which last Guido Cavalcanti was in Dante’s mind first, if not alone. Before Guinizelli Italian poets had accepted the other analogy of the troubadours of Provence, which applied to love the canon of feudal homage. For these the lady of desire was as the haughty baron to whom they owed servile fealty, and whose inaccessible mood was not of gentle meekness but of cruel pride, claiming willfully of her vassal perhaps life itself. But feudalism and its harsh canon of service were alien to the Italian communes; Italian poetry built upon an analogy with it must needs be an affectation. These burgher poets were only play knights; these frank Tuscan and Lombard girls were only play barons. Affectation, the pen following not the dictation of the feelings but of hearsay feelings, — this is the precise charge which Dante, from the standpoint of the “sweet new style,” brings against the older style.¹ But if as free burghers Italians could not really feel the alien mood of feudal homage, yet as Christian gentlemen they could, and should, sanctify their love of women with the mood of religious awe. There need be no affectation in that. Free burghers, they recognized no temporal overlord, no absolute baron; Catholics, they did believe in, and might with sincerity worship, ministering angels — “*donne angelicate*,” the *meek* ones whom, as the Psalmist had declared, the Lord has beautified with salvation.

Guido therefore can no more worthily praise his mistress than by calling her his “Lady of Meekness.” Indeed, by further analogy he sets her above the angels themselves; for the Christ himself had said: “*Mitis sum et humilis corde* — I am meek and lowly in heart.” For himself, “passion-rent” in his love, the poet speaks as St. Paul, — “we . . . had our conversation . . . in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath (*filii irae*).” And the *mercede*, the “grace,” for which he sues — solution of wrath by the spirit of meekness — is again in accord with Paul’s promise to these very “children of wrath,” — “By grace are ye saved through faith” — faith, that is, in loving and serving the one divinity as the other.

¹ *Purg.*, XXIV, 49 seq.

This is pious doctrine indeed for the fighting cavalier, skeptic, Lovelace I have in a measure assumed Guido to be. Is then his love creed also a pose, worse than the apes of Provence whom Dante exposed, because he thus adds hypocrisy to affectation? Well, if so, the same Dante would hardly have hailed him as "first friend" in life and master after Guinizelli in poetry, nor have outraged the memory of Beatrice by associating her in the *New Life* with Guido's lady Joan.

The solution of the apparent antinomy lies in the meaning for Guido of that *mercede*, that "grace," the granting of which by the lady, the meek one, might appease the lover, the one in "wrath." The term itself — Italian *mercede* or English "grace" — has a fourfold significance according as it is a function of the lady, of the lover, or of the reciprocal relationship between them. "Grace" in her signifies her beatitude, her "meekness"; in him, his "merit" which through faith and loving service deserves the boon, or "grace," of her condescension to redeem him from his "state of wrath," for which condescension it would be befitting him to render thanks, "yield graces, — a phrase now obsolete in English but used by Dante, — *render mercede*. Of this fourfold intention of the term the one fundamentally doubtful is the "grace" which is constituted by the act of condescension of the lady: what then is the grace or boon that the lover asks and hopes? In other words, what is the end of desire?

The answer is no mystery. The end of desire is always possession, in one sense or another, of the thing desired. In the practical sense possession of the loved one means union, physical or social, or both, sacramentally recognized, in marriage; but the sacrament of marriage allows a more mystical sense, presenting the ideal, hardly realizable on earth, of a spiritual union which is also a unity of two in one:

The single pure and perfect animal,
The two-cell'd heart beating with one full stroke,
Life.

So Tennyson modernly; but more in accord with the metaphysical mood of Guido is the old Elizabethan phrasing:

So they loved, as love in twain
Had the essence but in one;
Two distincts, division one:
Number there in love was slain.

To the "gentle heart" there is no love but highest love; there is no union but perfect union, wherein two shall

Be one, and one another's all.

Until the "gentle heart" may attain to that perfect union its desire is unappeased, its "wrath" unsubdued. Tennyson premises it for the right marriage; but there is ever the doubter ready to remark that if such marriages are really made in heaven, they certainly are kept there. Human sympathy cannot quite bridge the span between two souls: self remains self; and though hands meet and lips touch and wills accord, there is always something deeper still, inexpressible, unreachable.

Yes! in the sea of life enisled,
With echoing straits between us thrown,
Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
We mortal millions live *alone*.

In vain, says Aristophanes in Plato's *Banquet*, in vain, "after the division (of the primeval man-woman in one), the two parts of man, each desiring his other half, came together, and threw their arms about one another eager to grow into one. . . ." True, Aristophanes in effect goes on, Zeus in pity consoled the loneliness of dissevered "man-woman" by physical union; but that consolation the "gentle heart" must forever regard as of itself inadequate and unworthy.

There is indeed a solution. Guinizelli and Dante read further into the *Banquet* of Plato — or into the Christian doctrine built upon that — to where the wise woman of Mantinea reveals the mysteries of a love extending into a mystic otherworld — at least so Christians read her teaching — where in the bosom of God all become as one. There "wrath" is resolved into "meekness" perfectly.

The love of Guinizelli, and of Dante, was the love of happier men of which Arnold speaks:

Of happier men — for they, at least,
Have *dream'd* two human hearts might blend
In one, and were through faith released
From isolation without end
Prolong'd.

But if Guido, even as Arnold, lacked this faith, doubted this mystic otherworld whither therefore he might not accompany his first friend to find his Giovanna, as Dante his Beatrice, perfect in meekness, purged of all wrath, and to learn from her release hereafter from the dividing flesh, union at last with her spirit at peace? — if he was of those, even uncertainly wavered with those, who

. . . l'anima col corpo morta fanno? —

then indeed for him, in degree as his desire was ideally exalted, so its grace, its *mercede*, became an irony, a tragic paradox. His must be a passionate loneliness forever teased by an illusion, a phantom mate of its own conjuring. And I at least so understand the concluding words of the canzone:

For di colore d'esser è diviso,
 assiso mezzo scuro luce rade:
 for d'onne fraude dice, degno in fede,
 che solo di costui nasce mercede.¹

That is, the only love of which grace is born, entire possession granted, is love of the dim immaterial idea, — “*la figlia della sua mente, l'amorosa idea*,” as Leopardi calls it. Ixion embraces his Cloud. Guido's lady's desirable perfection, her “meekness,” exists not in her, but in his glorified ideal of her, “bereft” as that is “of color

¹ Bereft is (love) of color of existence,
 Seated half dark, it bars the light (i.e. *which might make it visible*).
 Without deceit one saith, worthy of faith,
 That born of such a love alone is grace.

Rivalta's reading without *in* would apparently make *mezzo* adverbial. The commoner reading, “*assiso in mezzo oscuro luce rade*,” more naturally gives *mezzo* as a noun: “seated in a dark medium,” etc. The meaning is not substantially different. The reading *in mezzo*, however, is more suggestive, as implying not only the immateriality of the mental fact but also the darkening of the “medium,” i.e. the imagination, by the “Martian” ray of passion. The assertion of the invisibility of love is in answer to Guido Orlandi's question restated by Cavalcanti in v. 14 — “*s'omo per veder lo po' mostrare*.” Question and answer are alike absurd, however, unless we understand “love” to mean the *object loved*, which it may naturally do; one's “love” means both one's passion and one's lady.

of existence." Therefore Guido's mood is essentially one with Leopardi's when the latter exclaims :

Solo il mio cor piaceami, e col mio core
In un perenne ragionar sepolto,
Alla guardia seder del mio dolore.¹

Guido has himself described with quaint "preraphaelite" symbolism the process of progressive detachment of the ideal from the real in the ballata beginning "Veggio ne gli occhi."

Cosa m' avien quand' i' le son presente
ch' i' no la posso a lo 'ntelletto dire :
veder mi par de la sua labbia uscire
una sì bella donna, che la mente
comprender no la può ; che 'nmantenente
ne nasce un' altra di bellezza nova,
da la qual par ch' una stella si mova
e dica : la salute tua è apparita.²

The imagery here is manifestly in accord with contemporary pictorial symbolism, in which souls as living manikins issue forth from the lips of the dead; but the significance of the passage is, I take it, at one with that of the so-called Platonic "ladder of love" by which through successive abstractions the pure idea, the intelligible virtue, is reached. The following stanza in the same ballata again defines this "virtue" as "meekness," and again declares it to be merely "intelligible,"

for di colore d' esser . . . diviso,
assiso mezzo scuro luce rade ;

¹ Only my heart pleased me, and with my heart
In a communing without cease absorbed,
Still to keep watch and ward o'er my own smart.

² Something befalleth me when she is by
Which unto reason can I not make clear :
Meseems I see forth through her lips appear
Lady of fairness such that faculty
Man hath not to conceive ; and presently
Of this one springs another of new grace,
Who to a star then seemeth to give place,
Which saith : Thy blessedness hath been with thee.

only instead of the metaphysical directness of the canzone, the poet employs the theological tropes of the *dolce stil*.

Là dove questa bella donna appare
 s'ode una voce che le ven davanti,
 e par che d' umiltà 'l su' nome canti
 sì dolcemente, che s' i' 'l vo' contare
 sento che 'l su' valor mi fa tremare.
 E movonsi ne l' anima sospiri
 che dicono : guarda, se tu costei miri
 vedrai la sua virtù nel ciel salita.¹

And now the tragic note in Guido's is explained. It is neither the polite fiction, the "pathetic fallacy" of the Sicilian school, nor yet the quickly passing shadow of this life set between Dante and the sun of his desire.

La tua magnificenza in me custodi,
 Sì che l'anima mia che fatta hai sana,
 Piacente a te dal corpo si disnodi.
 Così orai . . .²

"So I prayed," writes Dante, triumphant in expectation ; but for those

Che l'anima col corpo morta fanno,

there could be health of soul neither now nor hereafter. Wherefore Guido's text in the analysis of his own passion is in all literalness the words of the Preacher, — "All his days . . . he eateth in *darkness*, and he hath much *sorrow* and *wrath* in his sickness." Until

¹ There where this gentle lady comes in sight
 Is heard a voice which moveth her before
 And, singing, seemeth that Meekness to adore
 Which is her name, so sweetly, that aright
 I may not tell for trembling at its might.
 And then within my soul there gather sighs
 Which say: Lo! unto this one turn thine eyes:
 Her virtue to heaven wingeth visibly.

² *Parad.*, XXXI, 88-91.

Guido prays indeed for release in death, not triumphantly as Dante, but piteously, in the spirit of Leopardi's words in *Amore e Morte*:

Nova, sola, infinita
 Felicità . . . il suo (the lover's) pensier figura :
 Ma per cagion di lei grave procella
 Presentendo in suo cor, brama quiete,
 Brama raccorsi in porto
 Dinanzi al fier disio,
 Che già, ruggiando, intorno intorno oscura.¹

Poi, quando tutto avvolge
 La formidabil possa,
 E fulmina nel cor l'invitta cura,
 Quante volte implorata
 Con desiderio intenso,
 Morte, sei tu dall' affanoso amante !²

Precisely in this mood Guido invokes death :

Morte gentil, rimedio de' cattivi,
 merzè merzè a man giunte ti cheggio :
 vienmi a vedere e prendimi, chè peggio
 mi face amor: chè mie' spiriti vivi

¹ Not only are Guido and Leopardi saying the same thing in effect, but even their figures of speech are in accord. There is evident similarity of symbolism between the soul-darkening storm blast of the one and the soul-darkening Martian ray of the other; although doubtless the mediæval poet may have conceived his "dark ray" as a real phenomenon.

² New, infinite, unique
 Felicity . . . he pictures to his mind :
 And yet because of it the wrath of storm
 Foreboding in his heart, he longs for calm,
 Longs for the quiet haven
 Far from that fierce desire,
 Which even now, rumbling, darkens all around.

Then, when o'erwhelmeth him
 The fury of its might,
 And in his heart thunders unconquerable care,
 How many times he calls
 In agony of need,
 Death, upon thee in his extremity :

son consumati e spenti sì, che quivi,
 dov' i' stava gioioso, ora mi veggio
 in parte, lasso, là dov' io posseggio
 pena e dolor con pianto : e vuol ch' arrivi

ancòra in più di mal s' esser più puote ;
 perchè tu, morte, ora valer mi puoi
 di trarmi de le man di tal nemico.

Aime ! lasso quante volte dico :
 amor, perchè fai mal pur sol a' tuoi
 come quel de lo 'nferno che i percuote ? ¹

At other times Guido describes the combat to the death between his "spirits" of life and love. He enlarges his canvas and, calling to aid a whole *dramatis personae* of the various "souls" and "animal spirits" of scholastic psychology, objectifies his mood into miniature epic and drama. This mythology of the inner world arose naturally enough to mind from the ambiguity of the term "spirits," meaning at once bodily humors and bodiless but personal creatures; and in Guido's delicate handling the symbolism is singularly effective. Only by exaggeration of imitation did it grow stale and ludicrous, meriting the jibes of Onesto da Bologna at such "*sporte piene di*

¹ Gentle death, refuge of th' unfortunate,
 Mercy, mercy with clasp'd hands I implore :
 Look down upon me, take me, since more sore
 Hath been love's dealing : in so evil state

Are brought the spirits of my life, that late
 Where I stood joyous, now I stand no more,
 But find me where, alas ! I have much store
 Of pain and grief with weeping : and my fate

Yet wills more woe if more of woe might be ;
 Wherefore canst thou, death, now avail alone
 To loose the clutch of such an enemy.

How many times I say, Ah woe is me !
 Love, wherefore only wrongest thou thine own,
 As he of hell from his wrings misery ?

spiriti." The following curiously rhymed sonnet may illustrate his manner in this kind.

L' anima mia vilment' è sbigotita
de la battaglia ch' ell' ave dal core,
che, s' ella sente pur un poco amore
più presso a lui che non sole, la more.

Sta come quella che non à valore,
ch' è per temenza da lo cor partita :
e chi vedesse com' ell' è fuggita
diria per certo : questi non à vita.

Per gli occhi venne la battaglia in pria,
che ruppe ogni valore immantenente
sì, che del colpo fu strutta la mente.

Qualunqu' è quei che più allegrezza sente,
se vedesse li spirti fuggir via,
di grande sua pietate piangeria.¹

It transpires then for Guido as for Leopardi that the only grace, the only boon of peace, to which love leads is death ; and so is verified

¹ The spirit of my life is sore bested
By battle whereof at heart she heareth cry,
So, that if but a little closer by
Love than his wont she feeleth, she must die.

She is as one dejected utterly ;
The heart she hath deserted in her dread :
And who perceiveth how that she is fled,
Saith of a certainty : This man is dead.

First through the eyes swept down the battle-tide,
Which broke incontinently all defense,
And by its wrath wrecked the intelligence.

Whoever he that most of joy hath sense,
Yet if he saw the spirits scattered wide,
In his excess of pity must have sighed.

the warning of those who came to meet him when he first entered the court of love :

Quando mi vider, tutti con pietanza
dissermi : fatto se' di tal servente
che mai non dei sperare altro che morte.¹

In reality, he knows the futility of any appeal to his lady for aid. She is indeed the innocent occasion of his suffering, but of it she is a mere passive spectator, hardly understanding it, and certainly helpless to relieve it ; and so Guido himself describes her in the sonnet beginning "S' io prego questa donna." In the midst of his agony,

Allora par che ne la mente piova
una figura di donna pensosa,
che vegna per veder morir lo core.²

Here then at last we find the explanation of his interpretation of Dante's sonnet, when he said that love fed Dante's heart to his lady,

vegendo
che vostra donna la morte chede.

She claimed its death not willfully indeed, as the capricious mistress of Ulrich von Lichtenstein "claimed" his mutilation, but innocently, unwittingly, in that her beauty was as a firebrand, her perfection, her "meekness," a goal of unavailing consuming desire. She is helpless to relieve him, because — and here is the core of the matter — it is not she, not the real woman, that he loves, but that idealization of her which exists only in his own mind —

for di colore d'esser è diviso,
assiso mezzo scuro luce rade.

Compared with this glorified phantom "nel ciel (that is, into the intelligible world) salita," the real woman also is but "ira," wrath and imperfection. So he pines for his lady of dreams, who thus a

¹ When they beheld me, unto me all cried
Pitiful: bondman art thou made of one
Such that for nought else mayst thou look but death.

² "Into my mind then seems it that there rays a figure of a pensive lady, coming to behold my heart die."

ghostly "vampire" feeds upon his human heart ; but the real woman, "the woman who does not understand," is no longer of moment to him. She is, as it were, but the nameless model to his artist mind. When that has drawn from her all that is of fitness for its masterpiece, it straightway leaves her for another otherwise completing the ideal type. Giovanna passes ; Mandetta arrives.

Una giovane donna di Tolosa
bell'e gentil, d'onesta leggiadria,
tant'è diritta e simigliante cosa,
ne' suoi dolci occhi, de la donna mia,

ch'è fatta dentro al cor desiderosa
l'anima in guisa, che da lui si svia
e vanne a lei ; ma tant'è paurosa,
che no le dice di qual donna sia.

Quella la mira nel su' dolce sguardo,
ne lo qual face rallegrare amore,
perchè v'è dentro la sua donna dritta.

Po' torna, piena di sospir, nel core,
ferita a morte d'un tagliente dardo,
che questa donna nel partir li gitta.¹

Plainly it is not of Giovanna, nor of any actual woman, but of his ideal woman, of whom Giovanna herself was but a reminiscence, that

¹ A lady of Toulouse, young and most fair,
Gentle, and of unwanton joyousness,
So is the very image and impress,
In her sweet eyes, of one I name in prayer,

That my soul's wish is more than it can bear :
Wherefore it 'scapeth from the heart's duress
And cometh unto her ; yet for distress
What lady it obeys may not declare.

She looketh on it with her gentle mien,
Whereunto by the will of love it yearns,
Because that lady there it may perceive.

Then to the heart it, full of sighs, returns,
Unto death wounded by an arrow keen,
The which this lady loosed when taking leave.

Mandetta reminds him. In her turn Mandetta will pass also. Then will come Pinella, or another — what does it matter? What cared Zeuxis for any one of his five Crotonian maidens, once each in her turn had supplied that particular trait of loveliness which only she, perhaps, had to offer, but had to offer only?

Mentre ch' alla beltà, ch' i' viddi in prima
 Apresso l' alma, che per gli ochi vede,
 L' immagin dentro cresce, e quella cede
 Quasi vilmente e senza alcuna stima.¹

The words are Michelangelo's, but the idea is in effect Guido's. And it is an idea which, I think, renders perfectly compatible in him constancy in ideal love with inconstancy in real loves. To keep faith with perfection is to break faith with imperfection. The love of Guido brooked no compromise. The perfect one might be unattainable in this life; perfect union with her, even if found, might be impossible in this life; there might be no other life than this so marred by the perpetual "state of wrath" to which his impossible desire in its impotence doomed him; yet nevertheless Guido was willing to be damned for the greater glory of Love.

In conclusion, I would quote a passage from the elegy to *Aspasia* of Leopardi, which puts into modern phrasing exactly what I conceive to be Guido's intention, obscured as that is for us by its scholastic terminology and its mixture of chivalric and obsolete psychological imagery. Especially I would call attention to the precisely similar way in which Leopardi, like Guido, combines in his mood the loftiest idealization of Woman with the most contemptuous conception of women. So Hamlet insults, even while he adores. Dante too had his cynical time, to judge from Beatrice's immortal rebuke, — when he

. . . volse i passi suoi per via non vera,
 Imagini di ben seguendo false.

¹ While to the beauty, which first drew my gaze,
 My soul I open, which looketh through the eyes,
 The inward image grows, the outward dies
 In scorn away, unworthy all of praise.

But Dante was saved from ultimate cynicism, ultimate unfaith, by the promise of perfect union with his ideal in paradise. That promise Guido, like Leopardi, rejected.

Here is Leopardi's confession :

Raggio divino al mio pensiero apparve,
 Donna, la tua beltà. Simile effetto
 Fan la bellezza e i musicali accordi,
 Ch' alto mistero d' ignorati Elisi
 Paion sovente rivelar. Vagheggia
 Il piagato mortal quindi la figlia
 Della sua mente, l'amorosa idea,
 Che gran parte d' Olimpo in sè racchiude,
 Tutta al volto, ai costumi, alla favella
 Pari alla donna che il rapito amante
 Vagheggiare ed amar confuso estima.
 Or questa egli non già, ma quella, ancora
 Nei corporali amplessi, inchina ed ama.
 Alfin l'errore e gli scambiati oggetti
 Conoscendo, s' adira . . .

(" *S'adira!* " — "is wrathful" — Leopardi's very words form a gloss to Guido's. But as little as Guido's is Leopardi's wrath directed against the real woman, innocent occasion of his illusion and disillusion. Leopardi continues :)

. . . e spesso incolpa
 La donna a torto. A quella eccelsa imago
 Sorge di rado il femminile ingegno;
 E ciò che inspira ai generosi amanti
 La sua stessa beltà, donna non pensa,
 Nè comprender potria. . . .

("The woman who does not understand" !)

. . . Non cape in quelle
 Anguste fronti ugual concetto. E male
 Al vivo sfolgorar di quegli sguardi
 Spera l' uomo ingannato, e mal richiede
 Sensi profondi, sconosciuti, e molto
 Più che virili, in chi dell' uomo al tutto

Da nature è minor. Che se più molli
 E più tenui le membra, essa la mente
 Men capace e men forte anco riceve.¹

So the idealist skeptic of the nineteenth century aligns himself with the idealist skeptic of the thirteenth, even to that last truly mediæval touch — *confusio hominis est femina*. And, if I have not somewhere gone off on a tangent, I have described my circle. Guido's philosophy of love at least fits with the hypothesis of his skepticism, and a practical consequence of both would be that actual fickleness of heart to which tradition again bears witness.

¹ A ray celestial to my thought appeared,
 Lady, thy loveliness. Similar effects
 Have beauty and those harmonies of music
 Which the high mystery of unfathomed heavens
 Seem oftentimes to illumine. Even so
 Enamoured man upon the daughter broods
 Of his own fancy, the amorous idea,
 Which great part of Olympus comprehends,
 In feature all, in manner, and in speech
 Unto the woman like, whom, rapturous man,
 In his false lights he seems to see and love.
 Yet her he doth not, but that other, even
 In corporal embracings, crave and love.
 Until, his error and the intent transferred
 Perceiving, he grows wrathful; and oft blames
 With wrong the woman. To that ideal height
 Rarely indeed the wit of woman rises;
 And that which is in gentle hearts inspired
 By her own beauty, woman dreams not of,
 Nor yet might understand. No room have those
 Too straitened foreheads for such thoughts. And fondly
 Upon the spirited flashing of that glance
 Builds the infatuate man, and fondly seeks
 Meanings profound, undreamt-of, and much more
 Than masculine, in one than man in all
 By kind inferior. For if more tender,
 More delicate of limb, so with a mind
 Less broad, less vigorous is she endowed.

JEFFERSON B. FLETCHER.